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FM USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4778
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE

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SUBJECT: GEORGIA CHALLENGES RUSSIA, SECURITY COUNCIL

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. The UN Security Council failed on August 8 to reach a consensus on a press statement in reaction to the developing conflict in South-Ossetia, Georgia. In a dramatic public session, the Georgian PermRep asked the Russian PermRep whether Russia was prepared to call off the bombers he said were about to pummel Georgian cities. He also pointedly asked the Security Council what it was prepared to do to stop the conflict. Russian PermRep Churkin claimed Georgia was the aggressor and Russia was only defending its citizens in South Ossetia. The Belgian Security Council Presidency announced plans to call for further closed consultations on August 9, in another attempt to reach consensus on a press statement. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Security Council suspended its consultation on the South-Ossetia, Georgia conflict late in the day on August 8 after it failed to reach consensus on a press statement. Various versions of the draft press statement -- expressing concern over the escalating violence and casualties, calling for immediate cessation of hostilities and resumption of negotiations -- broke down over the course of the afternoon, primarily over U.S.-Russia differences over whether the statement should reaffirm Georgia's territorial integrity, refer to more than two parties, or call for a ceasefire before or after a return to the status quo ante.

¶3. (SBU) Notwithstanding Ambassador Khalilzad's harsh criticism of Russia to the press following the second public session, several Council members remained enthusiastic enough about the prospects of reaching consensus that a Saturday morning session, August 9, will be scheduled after Belgium circulates a further composite text this evening.

¶4. (SBU) The consultations were interspersed around a public session, which was requested by Georgia. It featured a dramatic exchange between the Russian and Georgian Permanent Representatives that culminated in the Georgian confronting the Russian, saying Russian bombers are in the air and are about to bomb Georgia, and asking, "will you stop?" Ambassador Khalilzad noted in his statement that the Georgian PermRep had committed in his statement to a ceasefire, whereas the Russian PermRep had been silent on that point. The Georgian PermRep also pointedly asked the Council what it was willing to do in the face of Russian aggression.

¶5. (SBU) Russian Ambassador Churkin deflected calls by several Council members to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, and instead focused his comments on accusing Georgia of engaging in "ethnic cleansing" in South Ossetia. He claimed that Georgia was targeting Russian peacekeepers and he said firmly that Russia would not allow actions against Russian nationals to go unpunished. Khalilzad